

Bob Rose / LIVING ON ISLANDS

(for Gordon Payne)

At 3 A.M. you know it too —

It all turns back on itself :
you turn
on yourself, your friends
wife, child, in mind
hate turns into —

How does it go? Boredom to frustration
to madness? Look, there's a gale blowing
the guts out of the gulf; every crow
from Downes Point wheels on its pivot in the wind.

The old people didn't live here, burning
the brush for deer, burying their dead under the cliffs

— Lift a bone, break a bone —
the locals say
and go periodically mad or drive their wives
to drink or themselves into a small
corner. And they love it and wouldn't live elsewhere.
After all these years could they
after the enchantment?

Islands off of islands off of islands.
et cetera

There's no end to the isolations
we live in, the armor of our love.

Who isn't wounded? Who isn't unto himself?
In spite of this we struggle, we shore up the breaches
of our pettiness against the mainland rush.

"Yeah, Rick hasn't changed over the years. Just grown more twisted,
gnarled, wind bent and shaped. Five more years and he'll be
a baptized local, fruit cup and all."

See those arbutus, there, on the point: aren't they our island
lives, isn't this another view, another landscape, another
escape? All interrogative
paths — thru the grove to the oyster rocks.
Ah! a small lusterless pearl.

"If that a pearl may in a toad's head dwell,
and may be found too in an oyster shell;
If things that promise nothing do contain
what better is than gold . . ."

Without work we wither and die:
without work the mind turns into a bog:
a miasma.

Those arbutus will never sprout oak leaves, we are all
Calibans and Prosperos, threatened and threatening. No
choice. A device for centering. A relief.

There aren't any ferries tonight, the weather's
fury won't abate. Even the crows have found a hollow tree or
a sandstone cave.

Face it. We won't be rescued from this island.
We must save ourselves. Translate Goethe's
'Be the hammer, be the anvil' to
'Be the island, be the mainland.'

Hate is no answer and
love, with what difficulty we come to it and how much
in spite of ourselves.

Such a polite world this
island, these closed
circles, the social equilibrium
curdles the milk, coddles
the false affections.

I don't want anyone to come home.
The fire's burning.

The door opens to those others who live here.
It's inevitable.
Let them in, let
them in.
They are yours and mine.

1/3/75